Finance & Accounting (F&A) Operations and Financial Planning Essentials

Advertising Industry Edition

10-Day Corporate Training Program

Running Case Company: AdVantage Media Group (illustrative advertising agency)

Course Overview

This extended ten-day program builds a strong, practical foundation in Finance & Accounting (F&A) operations, tailored to the operating realities of an advertising and media agency. It provides an end-to-end understanding of the core finance process landscape — Order-to-Cash (O2C), Procure-to-Pay (P2P), Record-to-Report (R2R), Financial Planning & Analysis (FP&A), and Treasury and Controllership — and how these processes interact within a campaign- and client-driven business model.

Throughout the program, participants work with a single running case company, AdVantage Media Group, a fictional mid-sized advertising agency. Each day closes with a one-line case study discussion prompt built around AdVantage's clients (e.g., Nimbus Retail Co), media vendors (e.g., Google Ads, Meta Platforms, The Trade Desk), and its underlying O2C/P2P/R2R financial data — so participants repeatedly apply that day's concepts to a consistent, realistic business context rather than a new example each day.

By the end of the program, participants will be able to plan, forecast, analyze variances, close the books, manage receivables and payables, and communicate financial insight in a way that is directly relevant to an advertising or media services organization.

Prerequisites

Participants should ideally have the following before joining this program:

- Basic familiarity with core accounting concepts (debits/credits, and the general idea of a P&L and balance sheet). No formal accounting qualification is required.
- Working knowledge of MS Excel, including basic formulas and simple tables — used throughout the case studies.
- General exposure to a corporate or business environment; prior experience in an advertising, media, or marketing services company is helpful but not required, as the agency context is introduced fully on Day 1.
- A laptop with MS Excel (or equivalent spreadsheet software) installed for in-class exercises and case studies.
- An open, business-partnering mindset — several sessions involve group discussion and cross-functional decision-making exercises.

Target Audience

- Finance & Accounting Professionals
- FP&A Analysts
- Accounts Payable (AP) Professionals
- Accounts Receivable (AR) Professionals
- Record-to-Report (R2R) Team Members
- Financial Reporting Executives
- Finance Shared Services Teams
- Business Finance Professionals, including those supporting advertising, media, or marketing services accounts
- Newly appointed Finance Managers
- Professionals transitioning into Finance Operations

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this program, participants will be able to:

- Explain the overall finance function and its strategic role within an advertising/media organization.
- Describe how O2C, P2P, R2R, FP&A, and Treasury & Controllership interact across a single client campaign.

- Explain the complete FP&A lifecycle and its business significance for an agency.
- Prepare and interpret budgets and financial forecasts, including driver-based forecasting for campaign-driven revenue.
- Perform variance analysis (price/volume/mix) and identify key business drivers behind agency cost and revenue movements.
- Support business decisions using cost-benefit, scenario, and sensitivity analysis.
- Develop meaningful financial commentary and present financial information using storytelling techniques.
- Explain the Record-to-Report (R2R) process, including month-end close, journal entries, and reconciliations.
- Apply best practices in Accounts Receivable (AR), Accounts Payable (AP), and Travel & Expense (T&E) processes.
- Evaluate working capital and cash conversion cycle trade-offs (DSO vs. DPO) typical of an agency business model.
- Improve collaboration between finance operations, FP&A, and business stakeholders.

Program Structure at a Glance

The original 5-day curriculum has been expanded into a 10-day program, adding dedicated depth to financial statements, planning, forecasting, variance analysis, business partnering, and executive communication, while preserving and deepening the original R2R/AR/AP/T&E content on the final two days.

3 Assessments would be conducted during the training to ensure the quality of the training delivered and to identify any potential areas of concern

Day	Title	Primary Focus Area
Day 1	Finance Function Overview & Finance Process Landscape	Understanding how Finance operates inside an advertising agency
Day 2	Financial Statements Deep Dive for an Advertising Agency	Reading the three statements through an agency lens
Day 3	FP&A Overview & Annual Planning Cycle	Building the planning backbone for an advertising agency
Day 4	Budgeting Fundamentals & Practical Budget Review	Turning plans into an actionable, governed budget
Day 5	Forecasting Basics & Driver-Based Forecasting	Keeping the plan alive as the year unfolds
Day 6	Variance Analysis & Financial Performance Analysis	Explaining the gap between plan and actual
Day 7	Decision Support & Finance Business Partnering	Finance as a driver of business decisions
Day 8	Financial Commentary, Storytelling & Business Communication	Turning numbers into a narrative leadership can act on
Day 9	Record-to-Report (R2R) Operations	Closing the books accurately and on time
Day 10	Accounts Receivable, Accounts Payable, Travel & Expense, and Treasury & Controllership	Capstone day — running O2C, P2P, T&E, and Treasury end-to-end

DAY 1

Finance Function Overview & Finance Process Landscape

Understanding how Finance operates inside an advertising agency

Pre-Assessment – An assessment comprising 10 MCQ questions to understand the familiarity with the basic concepts as mentioned in the pre-requisites

Session 1: Understanding the Finance Function

- Evolution of Finance — from transaction processing to strategic business partner
- Strategic role of Finance in a project- and campaign-driven business
- Finance as a business partner to Client Servicing, Media, and Creative teams
- Structure of a Finance organization (Controllership, FP&A, Shared Services, Treasury)
- Key Finance functions and how they interact
- Relationship between Finance and revenue-generating business units in an agency

Session 2: Finance Process Landscape

- Order-to-Cash (O2C) — billing clients for campaigns and services
- Procure-to-Pay (P2P) — paying media owners, platforms, and production vendors
- Record-to-Report (R2R) — closing the books and reporting results
- FP&A — planning, budgeting, and performance analysis
- Treasury and Controllership — cash, compliance, and internal controls
- How a single campaign dollar flows through all five processes

Session 3: The Advertising Agency Business Model

- Revenue models: commission-based, fee-based, cost-plus, and hourly/retainer
- Gross billings vs. net (agency) revenue — why this distinction matters for Finance
- Media pass-through costs and the agency's role as a principal vs. agent
- Retainer vs. project-based engagements and their impact on cash flow timing

Session 4: Introduction to Financial Statements (Overview)

- Income Statement, Balance Sheet, and Cash Flow Statement — purpose of each
- Where campaign billings, media costs, and receivables/payables show up
- Preview of the deep dive in Day 2

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

Using AdVantage's Q3 Brand Campaign for Nimbus Retail Co, discuss how one campaign flows through O2C, P2P, R2R, FP&A, and Treasury, and how the agency's fee-plus-pass-through revenue model shapes where that risk sits.

DAY 2

Financial Statements Deep Dive for an Advertising Agency

Reading the three statements through an agency lens

Session 1: The Income Statement

- Structure of the P&L: revenue, cost of services, gross profit, opex, operating profit, net income
- Gross billings vs. net revenue recognition for pass-through media spend
- Agency fee/commission revenue vs. production and media mark-up
- Gross margin as a health indicator for an agency (AdVantage's ~35% gross margin, as an example)

Session 2: The Balance Sheet

- Accounts Receivable from clients and Accounts Payable to media vendors
- Unbilled revenue and deferred revenue — common in retainer arrangements
- Prepaid media/production and accrued vendor liabilities at period-end
- Working capital and why agencies are structurally working-capital intensive

Session 3: The Cash Flow Statement

- Operating, investing, and financing cash flows
- Why an agency can be profitable on paper yet cash-constrained
- The classic agency float risk: paying media vendors on Net 45 while collecting from clients on Net 30–60

Session 4: Linkage Among the Three Statements

- How net income flows into retained earnings and the balance sheet
- How changes in AR/AP flow through the cash flow statement
- Building a simple three-statement linkage for a quarter

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

Using AdVantage's Q3 income statement, balance sheet, and cash flow figures, discuss why a profitable quarter can still see cash fall due to the DSO/DPO timing gap.

DAY 3

FP&A Overview & Annual Planning Cycle

Building the planning backbone for an advertising agency

Session 1: What is FP&A?

- Definition and evolution of the FP&A function
- Roles and responsibilities of an FP&A analyst/manager
- FP&A vs. Controllership — planning forward vs. reporting backward

Session 2: Business Partnering in FP&A

- Partnering with Client Servicing on account profitability
- Partnering with Media and Creative on resourcing and staff utilization
- Building trust and a common financial language with non-finance stakeholders

Session 3: The Annual Planning Cycle

- Strategic planning vs. the Annual Operating Plan (AOP)
- Planning inputs specific to an agency: new business pipeline, win rates, client renewal risk, staff headcount
- Rolling forecasts and performance monitoring throughout the year

Session 4: FP&A Deliverables

- Monthly flash reports and management packs
- Board and leadership decks
- Client/account-level profitability reporting

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

Discuss how AdVantage's FP&A team should structure the annual planning cycle around uncertain client renewal, new-business, and headcount inputs from Client Servicing, Media, and HR.

DAY 4

Budgeting Fundamentals & Practical Budget Review

Turning plans into an actionable, governed budget

Session 1: Purpose and Types of Budgets

- Why organizations budget: control, alignment, and performance benchmarking
- Operating budget, capital budget, and cash budget
- Static vs. flexible budgets

Session 2: Budget Preparation Process

- Bottom-up vs. top-down budgeting, and when agencies use each
- Setting and documenting budget assumptions (headcount cost, media growth, utilization rates)
- Budget calendar and stakeholder sign-off process

Session 3: Revenue, Cost, and Capex Planning

- Revenue planning by account, service line, and media channel
- Department cost planning: Creative, Media, Client Service, G&A
- Capital expenditure planning (technology platforms, production equipment)

Session 4: Practical Budget Review & Governance

- Using budget templates effectively
- Reviewing and challenging departmental submissions
- Budget governance: approval layers and version control

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

Discuss how AdVantage should reconcile a bottom-up freelance production budget request against a top-down agency revenue growth target.

DAY 5

Forecasting Basics & Driver-Based Forecasting

Keeping the plan alive as the year unfolds

Mid-Course Assessment – An assessment of 10 MCQ questions that could cover the topics that have been discussed in the previous 4 sessions

Session 1: Forecasting Principles

- Difference between a budget and a forecast
- Forecast horizon and frequency (monthly, rolling quarterly)
- Balancing accuracy with the effort required to update forecasts

Session 2: Forecast Methodologies

- Trend-based and run-rate forecasting
- Driver-based forecasting: billings = active campaigns × average campaign value
- Statistical/percentage-of-prior-period approaches and when they fall short

Session 3: Updating Forecasts

- Triggers for a re-forecast: client spend changes, new business wins/losses, cost shocks
- Version control and communicating forecast changes to stakeholders

Session 4: Common Forecasting Challenges

- Over-reliance on the prior forecast ("anchoring")
- Sandbagging vs. overly optimistic account-level forecasts
- Handling volatile, campaign-driven revenue in a media business

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

Discuss how AdVantage's FP&A team should rebuild a driver-based Q4 forecast after a key client cuts campaign spend mid-quarter.

DAY 6

Variance Analysis & Financial Performance Analysis

Explaining the gap between plan and actual

Session 1: Variance Analysis Fundamentals

- Purpose of variance analysis in a monthly reporting cycle
- Budget vs. Actual and Forecast vs. Actual comparisons
- Price variance, volume variance, and mix variance
- Structuring a root cause analysis

Session 2: Financial Performance Analysis

- Revenue analysis by account and channel
- Cost analysis, including media cost analysis by vendor/media type
- Profitability analysis at the account and campaign level
- Trend analysis and rolling KPI monitoring

Session 3: Applying Variance Analysis to O2C and P2P

- Using AR aging and DSO trends to explain revenue/cash variances
- Using AP aging and DPO trends to explain cost and cash timing variances
- Distinguishing a genuine cost overrun from a timing or mix effect

Session 4: KPI Monitoring

- Choosing the right KPIs for an agency: gross margin %, DSO, DPO, utilization, account profitability
- Building a simple KPI dashboard for monthly review

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

Discuss how AdVantage should decompose a media cost overrun into price, volume, and mix effects before reporting it to leadership.

DAY 7

Decision Support & Finance Business Partnering

Finance as a driver of business decisions

Session 1: The Role of Finance in Business Decisions

- Moving from scorekeeper to decision partner
- Where Finance should be involved: pricing, new business pitches, capex, make-vs-buy

Session 2: Evaluation Techniques

- Cost-benefit analysis basics
- Investment evaluation basics (payback period, simple ROI, introductory NPV concepts)
- Scenario analysis and sensitivity analysis

Session 3: Finance Business Partnering in Practice

- Supporting operational teams (Media, Creative, Client Service) with decision-ready analysis
- Working effectively with non-finance stakeholders
- Building credibility through data-driven, timely input

Session 4: Presenting and Influencing

- Structuring a recommendation for a non-finance audience
- Anticipating pushback and preparing sensitivities
- Influencing without formal authority

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

Discuss how AdVantage's FP&A team should evaluate an in-house programmatic trading desk against the current outsourced model.

DAY 8

Financial Commentary, Storytelling & Business Communication

Turning numbers into a narrative leadership can act on

Session 1: Financial Commentary

- Purpose of management commentary beyond the raw numbers
- Components of effective commentary: what happened, why, so what, what's next
- Linking numbers to underlying business performance and identifying key drivers

Session 2: Financial Storytelling

- Principles of storytelling with data
- Structuring a financial narrative for a leadership audience
- Highlighting risks and opportunities without burying the headline

Session 3: Decision Support Through Reporting

- Designing management reporting packs and dashboards
- Interpreting a dashboard for a non-finance audience
- KPI reporting cadence and ownership

Session 4: Best Practices in Executive Communication

- Common reporting mistakes (data dumps, buried headlines, inconsistent KPIs)
- Writing a concise executive summary
- Communicating recommendations clearly and confidently

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

Discuss how AdVantage should turn a three-point net margin miss into a one-page executive narrative for the CEO.

DAY 9

Record-to-Report (R2R) Operations

Closing the books accurately and on time

Session 1: R2R Lifecycle Overview

- The R2R lifecycle: transaction capture, journal entries, reconciliation, reporting
- Month-end close process and typical close calendar
- Role of the General Ledger as the system of record

Session 2: Journal Entries and Reconciliations

- Common agency journal entries: revenue accruals for unbilled campaigns, media cost accruals, prepaid amortization
- Balance sheet reconciliations: AR, AP, cash, accruals
- Bank reconciliation walkthrough

Session 3: Financial Reporting and Internal Controls

- Producing the P&L and balance sheet from the trial balance
- Internal controls in R2R: segregation of duties, review and approval controls, cut-off controls
- Common close risks specific to agencies (unbilled revenue cut-off, vendor accrual completeness)

Session 4: Close Governance

- Building and following a close checklist with clear owners and deadlines
- Fast-close practices and reducing days-to-close
- Handing off a clean close package to FP&A for management reporting

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

Discuss how AdVantage's Controller should sequence and resolve a late media accrual and an unexplained bank reconciliation variance to close on time.

DAY 10

Accounts Receivable, Accounts Payable, Travel & Expense, and Treasury & Controllership

Capstone day — running O2C, P2P, T&E, and Treasury end-to-end

Session 1: Accounts Receivable (O2C) Deep Dive

- Customer invoicing and cash application
- Collections process and escalation triggers
- Aging analysis and credit management
- AR KPIs: DSO, collection rate, aging mix, bad-debt reserve

Session 2: Accounts Payable (P2P) Deep Dive

- Vendor onboarding for media owners and production vendors
- Invoice processing and the challenge of three-way matching for media (no traditional PO/goods-receipt)
- Payment processing and vendor reconciliation
- AP KPIs: DPO, on-time payment rate, early-payment discount capture

Session 3: Travel & Expense (T&E)

- T&E process overview for an agency (client meetings, production shoots, location scouting)
- Expense policies and approval workflows
- Corporate card management and compliance requirements
- Expense reporting best practices

Session 4: Treasury and Controllership

- Cash management and short-term liquidity planning
- Managing the working-capital gap between DSO and DPO
- Banking relationships, FX considerations for multi-market campaigns
- Controllership: internal controls, compliance, and risk management across O2C, P2P, and R2R

Final Assessment – An assessment of 20 MCQ questions that would cover all the topics discussed in the training

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

Discuss how AdVantage's Controller should weigh a client credit hold, a vendor early-payment discount, and a T&E compliance issue as one integrated working-capital decision.